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Some Methodological Issues in the Study of Caste and Class in the Indian Village/Rural Social Structure*

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INTRODUCTION

1. How to conceptualize the bewilderingly complex social reality that is village India? One of the crucial steps is to be able to describe it in terms of the village social structure. But then, the concept of the "social structure" is an "essentially contested one". It is the contestedness of the concept (systematic ambiguity and disagreement as to what the concept means), that, I believe, gives rise to some critical methodological issues in the village studies.

(A) When we raise the question: What are the parts/components/elements of the social structure, the social scientists do not seem to agree as to whether these are institutions (Durkheim), groups (Evans-Pritchard), roles (Talcott Parsons), or classes (Marx).

(B) Also, on the question "what are the relations between the elements" they would describe these differently. (i) Influenced by the analogy of society as an organism, one may say, the functional relations between the elements constitutive of the social structure are such as to ultimately sustain the society as a whole. Some might describe this way of looking at society as based on the equilibrium model. I believe M N Srinivas's village studies are influenced by what I have loosely described as the equilibrium model. (Was he not a student of Radcliffe-Brown?) (ii)(a) The relationship between the elements can also be conceived differently. Besides functional consistency, some might discover tensions/conflicts between the various elements and how

these are resolved (within the social system). I believe Max Gluckman and Victor Turner have attempted to study simple societies in this way.

I was wondering whether Dr. Kathleen Gough's village studies point to this way of looking at societies.

(b) Another way of conceptualizing the relationship between the various elements (the classes) is to describe it as one of tension/conflict/contradiction, the resolution of this conflict leading to change and development. This is the way of Marx and one way of distinguishing this from (a) might be to describe it as the dialectical model.

Attempts to describe Indian society in general and village India in particular are made by Marxist scholars, some of whose articles appear in the recent issue of the EPW.

2. There is another dimension/complication bearing on the issue of Indian village studies.

(A) We describe it it terms of 'caste' structure. (M N Srinivas)

(B) We describe it in terms of 'caste' as well as 'class' structure. (Kathleen Gough(?), Andre Beteille , Joan Mencher).

(C) We describe it in terms of 'class' structure. (some Marxists)

And then again, the concepts 'caste' and 'class' are essentially contested concepts giving rise to methodological issues in the study of Indian villages.

3. May I say that the central concern/focus of this paper is conceptual and methodological? (What is methodology? "A methodology is the analytical study of methods. Specific studies are examined here as to the procedures adopted, assumptions made, and the results obtained. The nature of generalizations, if any, and the

explanations, if attempted, are also scrutinized". Dr. Gopala Sarana).

(I) In the first section, I make some remarks in the context of what is said in (1) and (2) in response to the questions: (A) What is the meaning of caste? (B) What is the meaning of class? The idea being to illustrate the contestedness of the concepts and some methodological implications. I do this with reference to Dumont, M N Srinivas and K Gough.

(II) In section two, I comment very briefly by way of methodological case studies the work of the village studies of M N Srinivas, Kathleen Gough, Andre Beteille and Joan Mencher.

(III) I try in the third section to identify a few of the issues thrown up by the Marxist methodology concerning village studies in the context of what some of the Marxist writers have said in the recent issue of the EPW.

I

CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

(A) THE MEANING OF CASTE

This leads us to the problem of definition of caste. Surely, the definition implies identifying criteria/cultural traits. We speak of the caste system implying that the cultural traits constitutive of caste are organically related so as to constitute a unity. Secondly, caste is a "historical expression meaning". A definition has to take account of both these facts.

Following Prof. Max Black, I would say the search for formulation of the definition of caste has to be in terms of "a system of overlapping and interacting criteria". This he calls a "range definition". "To provide a satisfactory range definition, we shall need (a) a description of the main factors engaged, (b) determination of their relative "weights" or importance, and (c) an account of their mode of interaction" (Black 1954:13).

What is the range definition of caste? Here, we may as well follow Hutton who says that normally caste conforms to the following criteria:

1. A caste is endogamous.
2. There are restrictions on commensality between members of different castes.
3. There is an hierarchical grading of castes, the best recognized position being that of the Brahman at the top.
4. In various kinds of contexts, especially those concerned with food, sex and ritual, a member of 'high' caste is liable to be 'polluted' by either direct or indirect contact with a member of a 'low' caste.
5. Castes are very commonly associated with traditional occupations.
6. A man's status is finally determined by the circumstances of his birth, unless he comes to be expelled from his caste for ritual offence.
7. The system as a whole is always focussed around the prestige accorded to the Brahmans (Hutton 1946:49 ch. VI; Quoted here from Leach 1971:2-3).

The problem of definition is not so much describing the criteria/cultural traits, but (i) that of locating the "relative weights or importance" (which ones are critical/basic/essential and which ones are non-critical/derived (part of the superstructure)/ accidental); and (ii) the way these are related to each other.

To illustrate, I consider the descriptions/definitions of caste by Louis Dumont, Srinivas and Gough.

(a) For Louis Dumont, what is critical is the principle of hierarchy based on the opposition between pure and impure; it "never attaches itself to power as such, but always to religious functions".

The hierarchical principle expresses conceptual or symbolic unity; "hierarchy integrates the society by reference to its values. The distribution of power, economic and political,..... is very important in practice, but is distinct from, and subordinate to, hierarchy." Further, the distinction between religious and social status obscures the issue: "Unfortunately, there has sometimes been a tendency to obscure the issue by speaking of not only religious (or ritual) status, also 'secular'(or social) status based upon power, wealth etc. which Indians would also take into consideration" (Dumont 1966:251-2).

May I hazard two comments on Dumont's view of caste? (1) The locus of the critical principle of hierarchy is in the "ideological model" of caste ("believed-in-traditional model"; what the Hindus believe to have been the traditional literati system); (2) This only means that Dumont's view of caste differs from the observers' model: the model constructed by outsiders including social scientists (ed. Banton 1965:135).

(b) Consider Srinivas's formulation: "A sociologist would define caste as a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed among other things, by the concept of pollution and purity, and generally, maximum commensality occurs within the caste" (1962:3).

This description does not indicate what according to Srinivas are relatively important factors/cultural traits, and what are secondary. But his field-studies perhaps indicate his bias: what impresses him is the ritual-ranking based on the concept of pollution; that the caste groups are closed, membership being determined by the criteria of heredity and endogamy; and the systemic nature of caste phenomena.

(c) What impresses Kathleen Gough is "the ranked-birth status" aspect of caste. Further, she says: "The caste, or a subsection of it,

is usually endogamous; it tends to be associated with an occupation. A caste is not a localized group, but comprises small local communities, often several miles apart. Local communities of different castes form administrative units as multi-caste villages or towns. Usually, the caste communities possessed hereditary differential rights in the produce of village lands, these rights being dispensed by a dominant caste group of land managers and village administrators".

"The formal ranking of castes is defined in terms of the belief in ritual purity and pollution; the rules of social distance between caste issue primarily from this belief. Whatever the origins of these rules, their codification, recording and adaptation to local circumstances have been primarily the work of the Brahmans.....The ubiquity of the Brahmans and their common possession of a sacred literature and a body of religious laws are apparently responsible for most of the common features of caste in the different regions" (Ed. Leach 1955:11).

K.Gough is interested in the relation of caste to power,- economic and political. Her field-studies, as we shall see later, are influenced by these considerations.

(B) THE MEANING OF CLASS

1. (a) "What would be the conception of class best suited to the analysis of rural society in India?", asks Andre Beteille. He goes on to say: "This is not an ideal question for it is possible to choose among several conceptions, each having its particular advantages. In sociological literature the most sophisticated use of the concept has been made in relation to Western industrial society and it may be necessary to modify it substantially in order to make it applicable (to the rural society in India)" (1974:35-6).

(b) But how do we define class? "Class can be defined in a number of ways and students of industrial societies have differed widely in their definitions of class. It can be defined in terms of interest or consciousness; in static or dynamic terms. Among these

factors property and conflict are of particular importance in definitions of class which draw their inspiration from Marx" (p51). What is Beteille's conception of class? It is not clear to me what conception of class his work presupposes. (But, to this issue, I shall return once again, later).

(c) The concept of class is used in the censuses. The basic categories used are: landlords, owner cultivators, tenant cultivators and agricultural labourers. "As Thorner has argued, these categories derive from a conceptual frame-work which is appropriate to the study of industry or even capitalist farming but not to the kind of agriculture which is commonly practised in India" (Beteille, 1974:46).

(d) Statistical and legal conceptions of class are used in socio-economic surveys and by economic historians. Beteille says: "The availability of numerical data leads to grouping of people owning or operating holdings of different sizes into different classes. There are two difficulties in this procedure. We can never be sure that people owning or operating, say, between 7.5 and 10.0 acres of land play the same social role everywhere, even in the productive process. Secondly, this way of grouping of people into statistical classes tells us nothing about social relations among them, i.e. the nature of rights, duties and obligations which form the basis of their mutual interaction." As to the concept of legal class "....Legally established categories do not always tell us much about the system as it actually works on the ground. Economic historians have for generations contrasted the Zamindari and the ryotwari system as if each represented a single pattern which differed in every way from the other. In actual practice various modes of productive organizations were to be found under each broad system and great similarities in the agrarian hierarchy might sometimes exist across the two systems of tenure" (1974:32-3).

2. Amongst the Marxist scholars concerned with Indian agrarian situation and village studies, the challenge remains as to how to arrive

at an agreed class analysis of Indian peasantry. While some (e.g. P.C. Joshi) would say that at the village (micro) level, class analysis in the Marxist perspective cannot be carried out ("class is not a tool of investigation at the village level." (Joshi 1975:72)), others have gone ahead in conducting village studies on the basis of class differentiation of the Indian peasantry (by and large, following Lenin and Mao). (e.g. Joan Mencher 1978: Ch. VII; vide, also Notes, Pradhan H. Prasad EPW 1979 (Vol.XIV, 7,8:484).)

What is the Marxist view of class? The EPW special issue says: "... Classes are defined by the relations in which the various sections of society stand to the means of production, by the manner in which the surplus is expropriated from the actual toilers, by which sections within and outside the country appropriate the surplus value from the actual toilers and by what do the expropriators within the country spend it on" (p.223).

The form of social classes implies a specific mode of production. At the macro-level how do we describe the contemporary socio-economic formation in India? What do the terms Asiatic mode of production, feudal, semi-feudal, colonial, capitalistic formations mean in the Indian context? One of the writers in the recent issue of EPW says: "Any simplistic all-India generalisations about the mode of production and the nature of social classes, though essential, are bound to be inadequate. For them to be realistic and purposeful, they have to be based on detailed studies of the specific social structure in the different regions of India" (N. Pandit, EPW 1979 (Vol. XIV, 7,8 :425.).

(As the concern of the last section is to identify some issues concerning Marxist understanding of caste and class in relation to methodological implications, I do not pursue the theme of Marxist view of class any further.)

II

SOME ILLUSTRATIVE METHODOLOGICAL CASE STUDIES

These case studies relate to the work of some social scientists who have been concerned with Indian village studies in terms of caste and/or class structure, based on intensive field-work. The aim is to concretize a few of the conceptual and methodological issues that emerge in terms of their work. (The considerations spelled out here are far too sketchy and may appear loose and scrappy.) Partly, the reason that prompted me to prefer M N Srinivas, Andre Beteille, Kathleen Gough and Joan Mencher is that their studies are, by and large (I believe), well known and surely well documented.

(A) M N SRINIVAS

(a) For Srinivas, an Indian village is a social system. A system implies a complex whole, a unity composed of parts in orderly arrangement according to some scheme (or plan). This complex whole is conceived on the organic model: "The various aspects of rural social life are <u>closely</u> integrated with each other, and an analysis of any one aspect of social life may, and usually does involve an analysis of one or more related aspects and their interaction" (1962:123) (italics mine). Influenced as he was, by Radcliffe-Brown, I imagine that Srinivas conceives the social system the same way a natural scientist conceives a natural system. (<u>cf.</u> the title of one of Radcliffe-Brown's book is: "Natural Science of Society.) I believe it is this bias which prompts him to say that a social anthropologist is value-neutral: "Unlike other social scientists, he (the social anthropologist) tries hard to keep his value-judgements to himself, and this gives him the necessary sympathy to grasp rural or tribal situation" (1962:123).

Why the social anthropologist selects/studies a small community like the Indian village? "...One of the aims .. in selecting a small community is that he wants to obtain an idea of the way in which all the parts of a society hang together. Even religion or law he tries to view it in relation to the total social system in which all the aspects are found to be constantly intersecting" (1962:120).

Srinivas is much impressed by the isolation and stability of Indian villages: "Nobody can fail to be impressed by the isolation and stability of these village communities" (1960:23). He approvingly quotes Charles Metcalf: "The village communities are little republics having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. This union of village communities,, each one forming a separate little state in itself has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India, through all the revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence" (1960:23).

Why the study of a single village? "...The study of a single village is productive of much more than knowledge about a single village. It is an attempt to answer a theoretical question by viewing it in relation to a body of self-collected data.... It provides an anthropologist with some insight into rural social life all over the country" (1962:121). "An anthropologist goes to live in a village for a year or even two not because he wants to collect information about curious dying customs and beliefs, but to study a theoretical sociological problem, and his most important aim is to contribute to the growing body of theoretical knowledge about the nature of human societies" (1962:134) (Italics mine). Srinivas does not seem to me to make clear what sort of "theoretical question" and "theoretical knowledge" he implies/means in the above statements.

(b) Srinivas speaks of, "The Social System of a Mysore Village" (ed. Marriott 1955:1), and "The Social Structure of a Mysore Village" (1960:21). The village is Rampura, "a large, nucleated village in the plains of Mysore District in Mysore State in South India". What are the parts, or elements of the system or structure that is Rampura? The parts are the castes. Why castes? "Caste is so tacitly and so completely accepted by all, including those who condemn it, that it is everywhere the unit of social action" (EPW 1979 (Vol.XIV 7 and 8):41).

What was the aim in making a study of Rampura? "My own aim in making a study of Rampura in the year 1948 was to get a detailed description of the way in which each of the nineteen caste groups behaved towards the others. I must confess I was a bit tired of reading about caste in general and it may come as a surprise to some to know that inspite of the great interest in the institution of caste, no one had seen fit to go and live in a multi-caste village and record in detail the interactions between the various castes" (1962:135).

Srinivas spent twelve months doing field-work in Rampura (ten months in 1948 and two months in 1952). The data was later analysed during nine months (1953-54). Rampura has a population of 1523 and consists of nineteen Hindu castes and Muslims. Each caste is traditionally associated with the practice of a particular occupation. Though traditional calling is not unchangeable, a caste may have more than one traditional occupation. "The peasant caste is the only caste in the area of Rampura which has agriculture as its sole traditional occupation. Peasants are the most numerous caste in Rampura, numbering as they do nearly half the population.... The bulk of the Peasants are actually occupied on the land, either as owners, as tenants, as labourers or as servants. All the biggest land owners in Rampura are Peasants "((ed) Marriott 1955:3). For Srinivas, the elements of the social structure are castes, and hence he is concerned with the interrelations, interactions between the nineteen

castes, their functions and how each contribute towards the functioning of the village society as a whole. For him, the term "Peasant" (Okkaliga) is a caste category, and though he speaks of the Peasant caste being differentiated into "owners", "tenants", "labourers", he does not seem to be interested in studying the interrelationship and interactions between them.

He describes the extent of conformity, change, flexibility and overlapping in traditional occupations of the castes of Rampura, through a caste-by-caste review with reference to (A) the Peasants, (B) Priestly castes, (C) Servicing castes paid at the Harvests, (D) Other castes.

As I said earlier, what seems to be central to the caste system to Srinivas is the hierarchy - a social stratification based on ritual-ranking inspired by the ideology of pollution. Hierarchy implies separation: "The essence of hierarchy is the absence of equality among the units which form the whole; in this sense, the various castes of Rampura do form a hierarchy. The caste units are separated by endogamy and commensality, and they are associated with ranked differences of diet and occupation. Yet, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the exact, or even the approximate place of each caste in the hierarchical system"((ed). Marriott 1955:19-20)

But then, how to account for the unity/integrity of the system with the fact that the elements/the castes are separated on the principle of hierarchy? This is achieved through the principle of interdependence between the various caste groups in the various aspects of their socio-cultural life - religious, economic, political,etc. "At the village level, castes were not only interdependent but acutely aware of the fact, and the annual grain payments made to the Smith, Potter, Barber, Washerman and Priest dramatized the interdependence. While each caste had its own solidarity, it was also aware of its solidarity with other castes - each Smith, for instance, competed with all other smiths for the custom of the land owners. Again, loyalty to one's village was

universal, and this was common to all the castes , from the Brahmin to the Harijan. It is necessary to point out here that the Harijan occasionally exercised authority over members of the upper castes and this was especially true of South India. Historical evidence going back to a few centuries testifies to his taking an active part in the deliberations of the village assembly. Even as recently as fifty years ago the Holeya Cheluvadi (hereditary servant of the assembly of village elders) of Kere village beat a rich Smith from Mysore becasue the other had the audacity to wear red slippers ... a privilege expressly forbidden to them in that area" (1962:74).

Is the village caste system static, unchangeable, lacking mobility and competition between its ~~elements~~/caste groups? Srinivas says that the system was flexible, permitted mobility and competition. "Caste system always permitted of a certain amount of mobility. This is why mutual position tends to be vague in the middle region. At one extremity no mobility is possible, while at the other it is extremely difficult" (1962:8). Later, he adds: "Sanskritization is both a part of the process of social mobility as well as the idiom in which mobility expresses itself. When there is Sanskritization mobility may be said to occur within the frame-work of caste...." (p.9). As to competition, "Though at the village level the local sections of different castes or, more correctly, households cooperated for agricultural production and for pursuing social and cultural ends, competition did occur at the higher levels for seizing political power and for achieving mobility...." Srinivas goes on to add: "...Leach's view that competition between castes is uncharacteristic of the traditional caste system is, in my opinion, totally wrong" (EPW 1979 (Vol.XIV.7 and 8):239).

Besides caste relationships and interactions, Srinivas does speak of the relationships between a master and his jita servants, a landowner and his tenants, a creditor and his debtors, and finally between a rich man and his dependents. But all these he subsumes under a single relationship: patron and client. "I use the term "patron"

..14..

... to mean "one who countenances, or was of influential support to person, cause, art, etc" ((ed) Marriott 1955:30). What is the nature of the relationship of patron-client, say, the relationship between landowner and tenant ? "The relationship between landowner and tenant is ... an intimate one - like all intimate relationships, it is frequently marked by conflict" (p.29). A patron (yajmana) is surely superior in wealth and status, but, "patronship in traditional India did not only confer rights but carried with it onerous duties towards clients." Srinivas goes on to say: "The term "patron" has acquired a bad odour in the last thirty years or so but this is due to concentration on "exploitative" aspect of patronship while at the same time ignoring its protective aspect" (EPW 1979 (XIV 7 and 8):238).

Description in terms of patron-client relationship has been criticized severely and I draw attention to one such criticism. Claude Meillasoux, "distinguishes sharply between class relation and patron-client relations, and calls the latter type of relationship "offshoots from the class relations" since the group of clients who specialized in specific activities, far from necessarily being exploited, on the contrary profited through the mediation of the patron who maintained them, from the exploitation of the labouring classes (slaves, serfs, agricultural workers etc). The client relationship ... was only a derived, secondary relationship whose functioning depended on the class relations that fed them" (EPW 1975 (XIV, 7 and 8):315).

May I conclude this part with Srinivas's main findings based on the Rampura study? "While the divisive features of caste have previously received notice, the links that bind together the members of different castes who inhabit a village, or a small local area, have not been adequately emphasized. Many features of village life tend to insulate castes from each other: endogamy, the ban on commensality, the existence of occupational specialization, distinctive cultural traditions, separate caste courts, and the concepts of pollution, karma, and dharma. But there are counteracting tendencies too."

"Occupational specialization requires interdependence among the

castes,a fact which is dramatized in the annual grain payments made to the servicing castes ...."

"Occupational specialization is important in other ways too. It gives each group a vested interest in the system as a whole, because under it each group enjoys security in its monopoly,....

"Local methods for settling disputes reveal the part played by the elders of the dominant caste"((ed). Marriott 1975:34-5).

B. E.KATHLEEN GOUGH

1. Trained as a professional social anthropologist (Ph.D. from Cambridge), Dr. Gough was awarded a studentship in 1950 to investigate relations between caste, village and kinship structures among the Tamilians of Tanjore district. In this paper, I refer to her three essays: i. "The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village" (from, Village India, (ed.) Mckim Marriott, 1955); ii. "The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village" (from, India's Villages, (ed.) M.N. Srinivas, 1960); iii. "Caste in a Tanjore Village" (from, Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and North-West Pakistan,((ed) E R Leach 1971).

2. Before I present Gough's observations about her field-based village studies, it might be helpful (a) to look again at Gough's definition/description of caste (the conceptual aspect), and (b) as a structural-functionalist what model she is committed to.

(a) I said earlier that the critical criterion in defining caste for Gough is "the ranked-birth aspect". In this, she is influenced by Max Weber. She speaks approvingly of Weber; "An excellent statement of the common characteristics of castes was given by Weber" ((ed.) Leach 1955:11).

Leach says that Weber's views on caste on the issue: "Whether caste is best considered as a cultural or structural phenomena", is "contradictory". Weber says that caste is "the fundamental institution of Hinduism, thereby implying that caste is a cultural concept. But,

he also says, that, there are also castes among the Mohammedans of India and the Buddhist, thereby implying that caste is a structural concept (caste is an extreme form of closed status group)"·(p.11).

L. Dumont says that Gough reduces hierarchy to relations of power in her understanding of caste (Dumont 1966:31). In this also, I believe she is influenced by Weber. Weber's concern was with class, status and power; these were "closely interdependent although none could be fully explained by others" (Beteille 1972:6).

I try to show later that Gough looked upon caste as a structural phenomena (was she not a structuralist?) rather than cultural; further, the relation of caste to power - economic and political - were crucial; this relation is intrinsic and not extrinsic, in the sense that without this, caste cannot be what it is.

(b) Like Srinivas, Gough is committed to the structural-functional framework for studying societies - simple or complex. Structure-functionalism presupposes an organic view of social system, and to this extent, Gough also is interested in showing the unity/integrity of the system as a result of the intrinsic/internal relations between the various parts (caste-groups), their interdependence, and the functional role of each, towards maintaining the system. But there the similarity between Srinivas and Gough as to their theoretical/methodological commitment ends.

I believe Gough is somewhat closer to Max Gluckman (as a structural-functionalist, he was the one to speak of tensions/cleavages/conflicts between the various elements of the system and their resolution resulting in the maintenance of the system); while Srinivas is closer to Radcliffe-Brown who conceived the organic view of society as a 'tight' system (for him, the difference between mechanical, organic and social system is not of kind, but of degree; I would say for him they are of the same logical type. I have criticized elsewhere, Radcliffe-Brown's structural functional model for studying social system as a species of scientism).

I have mentioned Gluckman. He has stated the case, I believe, well, in the following words: "...I now abandon altogether the type of organic analogy for a social system with which Radcliffe-Brown worked. Social systems are not nearly as integrated as organic systems, and the processes within them are not as cyclical or repetitive as are those in organic systems. Moreover, social systems are open to the influences of changes in environment, and to changes due to relations with other social systems, as organic systems are not. I think therefore much more in terms of series of social processes, operating within an ecological setting and the bio-psychical framework of human life, as well as of the restriction and action of a technology and a culture. These are never perfectly adjusted; and processes do not easily cancel themselves out as in organic systems. We have ... to think of a field of social action in which we can delineate certain processes set in motion by a series of customary institutions, which do largely 'hang together', but only largely, and not perfectly. The institutions, and the value and the laws they embody, are often independent, discrepant, and even conflicting. The structure of such a field is much less rigid and self-consistent than it was thought to be by social anthropologists from the 1920s to about 1950."

"As we examine the working of each process, we are, in a current popular terminology, analysing a model, though I would insist that we are dealing with a process that occurs in reality. It is a 'model' in so far as we are delineating only part of the reality we are analysing; and to get nearer to reality, we have to complicate the model by feeding in the influence of other processes."

"In reality, too, each process may work over a relatively limited period of time: then external events, or the cumulative working of varied and often opposed processes, may alter the basic pattern of the system" (Gluckman 1963:38-9).

I believe these preliminary conceptual and methodological considerations are likely to be helpful in understanding what Gough is doing

in her study of the Tanjore village.

3. Gough describes Kumbapettai, a mirasi Brahman village from Tanjore district in these words: "Kumbapettai lies eight miles north of Tanjore town, about two hundred miles south-west of Madras... In the centre of the village is a single street containing thirty-six occupied and twelve unoccupied Brahman houses. The Brahmans living in the village are small landowners, apart from six families who have recently sold their lands....Near the Brahman street are three streets of Non-Brahman tenants and servant castes.... The bulk of agricultural labour is done by landless labourers, formerly serfs, of the Pallan caste, who live, in eighty-nine houses in five streets, beyond paddy fields, outside the village proper"((ed) Marriott 1935:40.1).

Gough states the problem she was investigating and what she is doing in her three essays variously as follows: (A) "To what extent is Kumbapettai an isolable unit? And to what extent is it changing in this respect?" ((ed) Marriott 1955:41); (B) "Here, I attempt to outline the social organization of a mirasi village ... and to indicate what seem, after four months of observation, to be the most important trends of change" ((ed.) Srinivas 1960:90); (C) "I have emphasized what is known of the village's caste structure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At the same time I have tried to relate modern changes in the caste structure and loss of caste functions to changes in the villagers' relations to their means of production and to the wider society" ((ed.) Leach 1971:14).

I summarize Gough's findings very briefly in her own words. (I may be permitted to quote her extensively with a view to retain certain authenticity in exposition.) To capture the basic pattern of her observations/interpretation, I first present her account of (x) caste in traditional economy and (y) caste in modern economy.

(x) CASTE IN TRADITIONAL ECONOMY

What was the situation with the three major segments of the

caste hierarchy - the Brahmans, the Non-Brahmans (the service-castes) and the Ādi Drāvids (Pallans etc.)?

(a) The Brahmans: "In Mahratta and also early British law, all land in Brahman villages was managed jointly by the Brahman community, was impartible and might not be sold... In return for their rights of land management, the Brahmans paid, at various periods between forty and sixty percent of the village's grain produce, twice annually after each harvest, as revenue to the government" ((ed.) Leach 1971:21,22).

(b) The Non-Brahmans and the specialist service castes: "The work of all these castes was performed primarily on behalf, and under the authority, of the landlords" (p.25).

(c) Ādi Drāvids (Devendra Pallans): "Pallans were by law everywhere the serfs of landlords...They received daily payments in grain and similar gifts on special occasions. Their work was... more arduous, for between them men and women performed practically the whole work of grain cultivation of the village" (p.23).

Gough makes the following significant observations about caste in the traditional economy:

(a) Economic relationships: "Each caste group was virtually homogeneous in occupation and wealth" (p.26). "Within the village apparently, all economic relationships consisted of the provisions of goods and services in direct exchange for paddy, the chief source of livelihood. Within the village there was no middleman trader, no market, and very little economic competition. Because the highest caste controlled all the land, the most important economic relationships consisted of the rendering of goods and services by lower caste households in return for food, clothing and shelter" (p.27).

(b) Village: a self-sufficient production unit: "The simplicity of specialisation, the dyadic, hereditary, inter-household nature of economic ties, the direct exchange of goods and services for subsistence,

and lack of markets and cash transactions within the village depended on the fact that the village was an almost self-sufficient productive unit, deriving most of the basic necessities of living from its lands" (p.27).

<u>(v) CASTE IN THE MODERN ECONOMY</u>

(a) "During British rule a series of inter-connected legal and economic changes undermined the role of caste in the village economy" (p.28).

(b) "The new families (Non-Brahmans) entered into economic relationships of one or another kind with Kumbapettai's population, although only some of them entered service relationships with the Brahmans. As a social unit Kumbapettai thus expanded, but the economic control of the Brahmans over the lower castes was diminished" (p.29).

(c) "With the abolition of serfdom in 1843, most of the serfs became pannaiyals (tied labourers) of their former masters. The pannaiyal's work and payments remained the same as in previous centuries, but the relationship was in theory <u>contractual.</u> In fact, however, the pannaiyal lost security and also failed to gain freedom. As trade increased and the lower castes began to require cash for private transactions in the towns, landlords made periodic cash loans to their pannaiyals. In this way the pannaiyal became tied to his master by debt rather than (as formerly) by hereditary right ...As a result of this breakdown of hereditary/inter household service-relationships and insecurity of employment, many single families became detached from their local communities and wandered into strange villages in search of work" (p.30-1) (italics mine).

(d) Gough arrives at the following general observations about caste in modern economy:

i. "The caste is no longer homogeneous in occupation and wealth, for caste is today a limiting rather than a determining factor in the choice of occupation" (p.32).

ii. "Castes are obviously no longer characterized by hereditary differential rights in the produce of the village lands" (p.32).

iii. "With the extension of cash purchasing power to the lower castes and the introduction of markets into the village, many economic transactions now bear little or no relationship to caste" (p.33).

iv. "Caste is, nevertheless still a limiting factor, in Kumbapettai's economy. First, differences in average wealth, ownership of resources, education and occupational opportunities, although no longer upheld by law, persist as a legacy from the past...."

"Second, ritual rules of caste as well as economic expediency still limit the choice of occupations in Kumbapettai" (p.33).

In her 1955 essay in the volume edited by Marriott, Gough has summed up her conclusions as follows: "Today, Kumbapettai has moved about halfway in the transition from this relatively stationary feudal subsistence economy to a much wider-scale, expanding capitalist economy" (p.42).

4. I conclude this part with two observations on Gough's findings and procedure - one somewhat specific and the other somewhat general.

(a) Her analysis of the social structure of the village is conducted in the framework of caste, but in describing social change (in 1952) in Tanjore villages she sums up the case in class-terms: "In Tanjore villages in 1952, indeed, one major conflict overrode all others: that betwedn landed and landless. It results from acute agricultural overpopulation, the concentration of land-ownership within a small fraction of the population, and the failure to develop industrial employment for surplus villages. It seems logical to conclude that such economic and class conflicts, whatever their outcome, will in the future weaken the identities of caste" ((ed.) Leach 1971:59).

I imagine (there is no reference cited) Srinivas is referring to this statement of Gough when he says: "If it is Dr. Gough's opinion that the involvement of a caste in modern and industrial processes will necessarily lead to its extinction, then the areas of contradiction have to be mapped out clearly and the implications of the contradiction worked out." In the same place, earlier, Srinivas comments: "I am unable to follow Dr. Gough when she says that the taking on of political functions by a caste changes its nature so radically that it ceases to be a caste. Lingayats and Okkaligas are extremely active in the political life of modern Mysore but when selecting a bride, or in their diet and inter-dining, they observe the rules of their respective castes" (1962:7). (My impression is that Gough does not speak of "extinction" of caste or caste "ceasing" to be; but that is not the issue.) Srinivas's comment raises a conceptual dispute, and hence its relevance.

For Srinivas, the critical criteria for defining a group as a caste is hierarchy based on the concept of ritual pollution and endogamy and restriction on commensality. Hence his reference to intercaste marriage. For Gough, what is critical is the relation of caste to status, class and power. (Does she not try to understand caste phenomenon in terms of status, class and power?) For her, the undermining or change in the caste-based statuses of groups, and change in the distribution of power - economic and political - are indicators of the decline of the caste-system.

(b) How is it that Gough's dominant conceptual framework is the caste-framework, though some of her substantial findings are stated in class terms?

As one trained in the tradition of British anthropology, she is committed to describing the Indian rural micro-universe in terms of the categories of the people themselves (the conceptual scheme in terms of native categories constituting, what one may call a home-made model). The class-framework is an outsider's model, till the people

themselves seek identity in class terms. I would argue: it is the inadequacy of the "home-made" model to describe change today in the Tanjore village that necessitates her to use class concepts.

That caste-framework is inadequate to study the Indian agrarian situation and that we must also develop class-framework has been so emphatically stated by Andre Beteille. And then, Beteille (like Srinivas and Gough) has experience on the ground: his doctoral work, "Class, Caste and Power" is based on field-research conducted in a Tanjore village, Sripuram. These considerations led me to consider his views on a few issues relevant to the main concerns of this paper.

(C) ANDRE BETEILLE

I propose to consider Beteille's views on: 1(a) what he calls "the excessive preoccupations" of social anthropology's and sociology's concern with caste; and (b) the two frame-works - that of caste and the other of class; (2) his criticism of class categorization in censuses, and statistical model of class concept etc.; (3) his remarks on the sort of considerations relevant for developing an adequate class framework for agrarian social structure; (4) his main concern/aim for agrarian studies; (5) Beteille's methodological assumption: pluralism.

1. (a) Trained as a social anthropologist, Beteille's earliest pre-occupations were with Indian village studies based on field-work in the frame-work of caste. "I had started my field-work within a few years of the publication of a number of important studies of caste at the village level, and I had been told to make a list of the different castes in the village and to study every aspect of their mutual relations. In my case there was the added fascination of dealing with a caste structure that was elaborately segmented, so that I made lists not only of castes but also of sub-castes and sub-sub-castes" (1974:11).

Beteille says that detailed village studies in the caste frame-work, surely, has enriched our understanding of social life in contemporary India. "But too great a preoccupation with this problem has led the social anthropologist to develop his own conception of Indian society, a conception which many have criticized as being narrow and one-sided. Social anthropologists have tended to relate all cleavages and conflicts to those of caste and to minimize or ignore the role of other factors in society" (1974:23). He gives yet another reason why the social anthropologist's approach has been one-sided: "Yet even by the requirements of their own methodology the application of the social anthropological approach to the study of rural India has been narrow and one-sided. For the native categories of the Indian villager, the categories in terms of which he thinks and acts are not exhausted by caste; they also relate in significant ways to what we understand by class" (1974:49). Why have the social anthropologists used caste - instead of class - frame-work? "For in their own view caste is internal to the system they study in the Indian villages whereas class as it is usually understood relates to an external system of concepts" (1974:48).

(b) But then, the two major frame-works - that of caste and class are already in use: "Caste has been the major preoccupations of social anthropologists and sociologists.... Class has been the object of attention of agricultural economists who in their turn tend to view caste as more or less a subject of historical or even antiquarian interest" (1974:36).

2. Class-framework is being used by economists in the study of agrarian systems and Beteille is not saying perhaps anything new, when he speaks of the need for both the frame-works. But, he says that the sort of framework that is needed is different and he does not get much help from the economists. A sociologist does not "find much help from colleagues in other disciplines who were specialists in the study of agrarian systems. The economists, I soon discovered were interested in either 'models' or 'data', and for a substantial number of them 'data'

merely meant what could be put in the form of tables. The rigorously quantitative approach to empirical reality adopted by many agricultural economists has had two unfortunate consequences. It has led them to by-pass many significant problems which are not amenable to quantification, and it has acted as a barrier to easy communication between them and the sociologists" (1974:12).

As to the data provided by the decennial censuses and National Sample Surveys, the reports of government committees such as the Agricultural Labour Inquiry Committee and of the Rural Credit Surveys (of the R.B.I.) etc., Beteille comments: "A major difference between studies (conducted by the economists) relating to class (and expressed in the censuses, N.S.S. reports etc. mentioned above) and to caste is that the former appear to be more easily amenable to quantitative treatment. This has the advantage of enabling a global picture to be presented in terms that are not merely impressionistic. But it has also been responsible for creating the tendentious view that no discussion of the class structure can be objective or 'scientific' unless the material relating to it can be represented in the form of statistical tables" (p.45).

3. What sort of considerations Beteille thinks are relevant for developing an adequate class-framework for agrarian social structure?

(i) Beteille speaks of class, power and status as the three principal aspects of social stratification, an approach he claims was first developed by Max Weber. (cf. the title of his doctoral work: "Caste, Class and Power"). Further, stratification in terms of class is based on economic distinctions, but class is one of three principles and not the sole one. "...Weber, unlike many of his interpreters, assigned class a central place in sociological analysis. But he argued that status and power were also important and not wholly determined by economic factors.... Class, status and power were closely interdependent although none of them could be fully explained by others" (1972:6).

(ii) He says: "When we turn to village communities in India what strikes us is their highly differentiated nature... Very often the Indian village is clearly differentiated in terms of ownership, control and use of land so that in addition to peasant proprietors, subsisting mainly by family labour, there are other social classes both above and below. Where a community includes non-cultivating landowners at one end and share-croppers and landless labourers at the other, it is misleading to use the blanket term peasantry to describe it" (1974:25). At another place, he says: "There is a whole range of relations in rural India centering around the ownership, control and use of land. These relations are not only partly independent of caste but they have their own pattern of organization. A study of their modalities will give us an understanding of what is described here as the agrarian class structure" (1974:143).

(iii) What class categories? What has Beteille to say? "If we are to understand class not as an abstract and formal scheme but as a system of social relations then we will have to work through concepts and categories used by the people themselves. Our analysis will not come to an end once we have identified these categories but that is where we should begin" (1974:33). Given the wide regional diversities/variations, this would give rise to an extreme relativism in the use of the class categories, and the social scientist has to grapple with the issue of uniform categories in terms of which the complexity and variation can be intelligibly ordered. What is Beteille's response to this?

(iv) What about the categories, 'poor peasants', 'middle peasants' and 'rich peasants' etc? Beteille's objections are summed up thus: "Few people stop short of one single criterion in formulating their scheme of social gradation. Categories such as 'rich peasants','middle peasants' and 'poor peasants' in fact seek to sum up a number of major characteristics and are in that sense terms in a scheme of synthetic gradation. Even so, the basic problems remain:

at which points do we draw the line betwee 'poor' and 'middle' or between 'middle' and 'rich' peasants without fear of being arbitrary? Can we use a uniform set of criteria, given the extent of variation between districts and sometimes within the same district? And, most important, do these groupings reflect in any significant way the manner in which the peasants themselves divide up their social universe?" (p.124).

My comments are:(a) What is the point of drawing the line between 'poor' and 'middle' or between 'middle' and 'rich' peasant? The class differentiation of the peasantry in terms of landless, poor, middle, rich peasantry has something to do with practice (praxis) and is not merely an academic exercise. This does not imply that the problem of fairly workable criteria for identifying 'poor', 'middle' and 'rich' are easy to specify in a given historico-sociological situation.

(b) Beteille says that as a first step, we need to identify class categories in the idiom of the people themselves. This way of analysing classes would give rise to, what I loosely would call the home-made model. What about the observer's model? Without the class categories in terms of which the intolerable variations and diversities of Indian agrarian relations can be intelligibly ordered/conceptualized, how can we link up the micro- with the macro-situation?

4. What is Beteille's main concern or aim in carrying out the agrarian studies? "The main concern is with patterns of inequality and conflict as these arise from the ownership, control and use of land" (1974:1). Relations between classes in which Beteille is interested are relations of inequality.

In the essay "Inequality in Rural India", Beteille examines "some aspects of inequality in Indian society and certain changes that are taking place in them. The main question which arises while considering these changes in whether, they represent an increase or decrease in the degree of inequality or are merely changes from one type of inequality to another" (1972:19).

5. Is not inequality associated with class conflict? Not necessarily. "Mirasdars, Kuttahaiders, Pannaiyals and others have had relations of interdependence in this area for many generations. Even if we admit, for the sake of argument, that inequalities between landlords and the landless have increased in recent years, there is no question whether but that there were severe inequalities in the past and that landless have for long lived a life of poverty and squalor. In spite of this there was a measure of cooperation among the classes in the process of production. This does not mean that there were no tensions or conflicts between individual landowners and their individual tenants or labourers in their day-to-day relations. It only means that these tensions and conflicts did not lead to the kind of antagonism between groups which has become an important feature of social and political life in certain parts of Tanjore District"(1974:160).

6. What is the central methodological assumption of Beteille that influence his work on village studies? It is 'pluralism'. To illustrate: Beteille commenting on agrarian unrest in the Tanjore district says: "... Agrarian unrest has many causes, and that the same cause produces different results at different places because, it never acts in combination with the same factors everywhere. I think it would be futile to look for a single factor in regard to which we will be able to say that that alone is the cause of conflict of classes. There are in my belief very important structural reasons which make it impossible to predict phenomena of this kind" (p.169) (italics mine). Again, commenting on Kathleen Gough's observations in regard to clash of interest between the landowners and landless, and her view that "economic and class conflicts, whatever their outcome will in the future increasingly weaken the caste identities", he says: "These conflicts do not appear to have developed a linear path as Gough probably anticipated they would" (p.161) (italics mine).

I believe the pluralist position in social science tends to tread a safe path by being less committal and tinged by some scepticism. For social science which (at least as a regulatory principle) attempts to be more rigorous and is ready to the risk being wrong so that the social reality is not only grasped but can be tackled, the pluralist position cannot inspire a fruitful inquiry.

7. I began with Beteille's emphatic view that Indian village studies need the class-framework besides the caste-framework.

But what has he to say in regard to the 'relationship' between the two frame-works? Surely, he says, both frameworks are needed and criticizes Marxists who argue that "Caste conflicts are really distorted expressions of more fundamental social conflicts -

in short, class conflicts" (1969:86).

Now he says that "caste and class in rural India share important properties in common and that they can be meaningfully studied within a single framework" (1974:38).

I would say: unless this is shown, Beteille's statement perhaps says that this is so ! My impression is that Beteille's work which I referred to in this paper, does not clearly show the common properties shared by caste and class (it is not clear, what, "common properties shared by caste and class", means !) . Also, it is not clear to me, how far Beteille has succeeded in developing a single framework within which studies in Indian village social structure can be carried out through caste as well as class analysis.

(D) JOAN MENCHER

1. Given the focus and concerns of the present paper, I have been tempted to make a few remarks about Joan Mencher's Indian village studies, now brought out under the title, "Agriculture and Social Structure in Tamil Nadu" (Allied Publishers, 1978). I refer to only four of the chapters (II, VI, VII and XI) from this book, and my acquaintance with the book, I am afraid, is somewhat superficial. Nonetheless, as I felt that the book is rigorously documented and argued within a clear theoretical framework, which the author explicitly states in the Introduction, I should at least try to take note of it.

Mencher describes the theoretical perspective she has taken in this study as follows: "...It is clear that any particular epoch is historically specific and governed by its own laws. As such, the analytical concepts that are used must be also specific. For example, the category of capital does not simply denote the instrument of production. Rather, the instruments of production become capital only when they are the monopoly of a certain class.... In agrarian systems undergoing or having undergone capitalist transformations, la[nd] is the most important source of wealth or capital. Thus, I shall try

to analyse how land is held and distributed, and what is the ownership pattern, and how it is actually cultivated" (1978:7).

The aim of this study is, "to explore in detail the complex relationship between agricultural practice and socio-economic structure. The area chosen for study is Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu" (p.14).

2. What is the method of study followed? "It attempts to combine the intensive case-study approach of the cultural anthropologist with broad-scale survey work, as well as the use of archival materials relating to historical background (14)...the combination of survey data, information collected by assistants, and my own intensively collected data can help to present a much more well-rounded picture of the situation than could be obtained by an anthropologist working in-depth in one or two villages. Furthermore, in many instances the data collected by assistants provide a necessary corrective to the impressions obtained from intensive study... It is also true that intensive study throws up many questions and ideas which could never be obtained from a survey. As an example, no survey would have provided an inkling of the multitude of ways in which records of land holdings are concealed and manipulated. This knowledge was obtained only at the cost of the most persistent and exhaustive inquiries which I have ever conducted. Yet it is crucial information" (p.15).

3. The substance of the theme on, "Agriculture and Caste" (chapter VI) is outlined thus: "Against a background of caste composition from earlier census data, and the relationship between districtwise caste distribution and the detailed picture on the village level...., this chapter discusses the relevance of caste to landholdings....., to tenancy...., and to the status of agricultural labourers.... The chapter points out the close correlation between caste and class, and discusses the extent to which this is consistent with the development of capitalist agriculture...."(p.126).

I describe below, what I consider perhaps her significant

observations on the relationship between agriculture and caste:

(i) "From the point of view of the relationship between social structure and practice of agriculture, sub-caste differences are clearly not significant. What is far more significant is the relationship between caste and social, economic and political power. In particular, the correlation between caste and economic position is striking" (p.129).

(ii) "The traditional picture of caste in rural India is grossly misleading, at least for regions such as this. This general picture that has been presented is one which tends to equate caste with occupational specialization. Yet the fact is that the majority of people in rural India have been primarily engaged in activities related to agriculture, either as workers (landless, or tenanted or self-owned land) supervisors (on either tenanted or owned land), or simply enjoying the benefits of agriculture (via tenants). In addition, there are those who subsist on the sale of agricultural commodities outside the village, and by selling other things in the village. Even among the caste groups which officially had assigned occupations, it was never possible for all of them to work at the assigned occupations" (p.134).

(iii) "Basically, there are three categories of people: landowners, tenants, and labourers, though the rank of each category are not mutually exclusive... It is clear that these three groups form the core of Indian village society. This is not to say that castes with specialized functions are not important, but rather that in a sense they owe their existence to the large agricultural communities" (p.135).

(iv) As to the concept of caste dominance? "It is useful in this connection to examine the relationship between types of caste dominance by number and by land ownership... In most cases land dominance goes with high caste, numerical dominance with low caste"(p.136).

(v) "Some have argued that the differentiation into these three

categories is more closely related to the organization of production than caste. But the fact is that the organization of production is closely interrelated with caste. Thus ... most of the landowners are of higher caste, and the vast majority of agriculturers are untouchables and other lower castes" (p.136).

(vi) "There is a close correlation between caste and concentration of landholdings, though there is no simple correlation between caste membership and landownership... Thus, looking at the upper level, 17 per cent of the Brahmans, 12 per cent of the Reddiars, and 11 per cent of the Vellalars owned over 15 acres, while none of the Paraiyans and only 3 per cent of the Vanniyars did" (p.136).

4. The substance of the theme on, "Agriculture and Class" is outlined thus: "This chapter presents a classification of the rural population into six categories (socio-economic classes in rural Chingleput district), followed by some illustrative vignettes of typical families (some typical households : Examples of landless households; Poor peasant households; Middle peasant households; Some rich farmers; Two capitalist farmers). It then goes on to discuss Other sources of money and power available to those in the higher classes, the relevance of the terms 'feudalistic' and 'capitalistic' in discussing social relations in this region (capitalist vs. feudal relations), and some details about the relatively small proportion of Non-agricultural households in the region. The section titled Analysis discusses some of the contradictions within the systems, and factors tending to mask the existence of class distinctions" (p161).

(i) The socio-economic classes categorized are: the landless, poor peasants, middle peasants, rich farmers, farmers holding land between 15-30 acres and those holding above 30 acres.

(ii) What are the modalities of conflicts and between which classes?

(a) conflict between landless labourers (who account for close

to half the population in the major rice regions of the state) and the large landowners; (b) conflict between the many small landowners and the few large landowners who control most of the village lands; (c) conflicts about who should get water and about the use of water; (d) tensions in the bureaucracy that lead village-level leaders to over-report use of seeds or yields; (e) conflicts within the ranks of the poor about getting hired, or about getting land for temporary share-cropping; (f) conflicts about the use of money for possible development projects; (g) conflicts among the different departments of government involved in programmes (e.g. between those responsible for irrigation, the electricity board, and the Block Development Officer, about how to energize the well) (p.3-4).

5. What is Mencher's characterization of the relations of production in the area under study? "In looking at the relations of production in this area today, they appear to be a kind of mixture of feudalism and capitalism. The relations between high-caste landowners and Harijans strongly suggest the survival of feudal ties of one kind or another. Most Harijans will hesitate to walk on the Brahman street in villages where there are many Brahmans" (p.153).

6. Whether caste or caste-like phenomena play any significant role in capitalist relations? "Race and ethnicity are part and parcel of an advanced monopoly capitalism such as the United States. Racism and ethnocentricism, like casteism, can and have been used as mechanisms of oppression, and particularly as ways of keeping labourers from uniting on the basis of common class interests... Caste is often consciously manipulated by capitalist landowners and their supporters" (p.153).

7. Feudal or capitalist relations? With reference to agricultural labourers: "Despite the fact that some of the labourers are

working as Padiyals (permanent agricultural labourers), the vast majority of labourers in this area are united....In this area the majority of labourers are 'free wage labourers' - but 'free wage labourers' in a situation of limited employment" (p.153).

8. Why do the lowest castes not rebel? "...It is a gross simplification to speak of feudal ties as the dominant reason why the lowest castes in this case do not rebel any more. In the case of Pariyans, it is clear that the straight and simple fear of the brute force on top is an extremely important factor. Paraiyans must move slowly and carefully where they are powerless" (p.154). "....It is not solely feudal relations within the village that prevent more active organization against caste oppression, but also knowledge of how the cards are stacked against the poor outside the village" (p.153-4).

9. Now, as to the last question: Whether socio-economic relations in India's villages can today be characterized as primarily feudal or primarily capitalist?

(i) "The landless are in many cases bound to the landed by ties which seem to be of the feudal type. Landless labourers have to do all kinds of favours for those who employ them steadily, even if they are permanent Padiyals or bound labourers, and more so if they are heavily in debt to the landowner" (p.188).

(ii) "Some social scientists have called the structure of Indian agriculture semi-feudal in the sense that it has certainly been influenced by the colonial experience and the penetration of the modern market economy, since landlords still get their main income from rents and money lending. There appears to be considerable variation from one part of the country to another in this regard. In Chingleput, by the 1970s, the majority of landlords derived their main income from the sale of produce, not from rents" (p.188).

(iii) "In all of our villages, the majority of the landless labourers or mini-farmers who go out as landless labourers are not permanently attached to any particular landlord. Indeed, in any season,

most labourers tend to work for a number of households" (p.188).

(iv) "With this degree of fluidity of tenancy and employment, it is hard to make a simple characterization of the mode of production here. It contains both feudal and capitalistic elements. A description of the production process requires first of all an understanding of the regional variation, and secondly an understanding of the social relations of production" (p.190).

(v) And lastly, "To characterize this region as semi feudal (as Breman does for Gujarat) would be quite misleading. It is true that the poor can often be manipulated by the larger landowners, but this is because of such factors as the lack of organization among the landless and (at least at times) the excess of labour" (p.190).

I believe that Joan Mencher's observations based on her field-work in Chingleput would be of interest as representing an attempt at Marxist analysis of class and caste structure of village India. Hence, what she says prepares some background for the last section in which I try to highlight some issues on this theme, especially in the light of what has been said in the recent issue of the EPW. I have taken the liberty of stating her views in her own words to avoid any possible distortion.

CONCLUSION

In the Note I submitted to the MIDS meeting on 9th December, I suggested a perspective for the consideration of the methodological issues in the study of class and caste of the Indian rural social structure. I said the issues arose primarily because of the contestedness of the key concepts 'social structure', 'caste' and 'class'. Studies in social structure/system can be conceived/designed in terms of two models - the equilibrium, and the conflict models. I confess, my use of the term model is not precise, but my use was solely for heuristic purposes and to draw attention to the two different ways in which social systems can be conceptualized, and studied.

In the Note, I raised questions without any attempt to answer, concretize or illustrate the point of these questions. How to do this? I thought it may be fruitful to do this in terms of what I call, methodological case studies. By this I mean identifying social scientists who have carried out Indian village studies, whose work is supported by hard empirical data - and that is the point of identifying work based on intensive field-work. I try to lay bare their conceptual and methodological presuppositions and implications. Besides, I also felt it might not be out of place to describe their significant findings.

I selected the village studies of M N Srinivas, Kathleen Gough, Andre Beteille and Joan Mencher, to concretize the perspective of the Note:

A. Srinivas's studies as illustrative of village studies based on the caste-framework and influenced by the equilibrium model of a social system;

B. Gough's studies as illustrative of village studies essentially based on caste-framework in the structural-functional tradition, but influenced by Gluckman type of conflict model;

C. Beteille's work as illustrative of village studies based both on caste and class framework with focus on inequality and conflict and influenced by the Weberian perspective;

D. Mencher's studies as illustrative of village studies based essentially on class analysis in the Marxian perspective, still with caste-framework as the background.

In the course of this illustrative exercise, several conceptual and methodological issues that emerge are not carefully articulated and pursued further. But this would be clearly beyond the scope of a small article. If, in the course of this broad survey, one gets a little sensitized or becomes aware of the issues/structure of issues on this highly complex theme of class and caste in rural India, the purpose would have been served.

III

THE MARXIAN PERSPECTIVE

The context in which some of the issues have been raised in this section is the recent Annual Number of the EPW devoted to "Class and Caste in India". Given the constraints of a small paper, I shall severely restrict myself by merely raising the issues, and not perhaps discussing them.

I. "CLASSES IN CASTE IDIOM"

This is the title of the editorial of the EPW (Vol.XIV, Nos.7 and 8, 1979, p.223; unless otherwise stated all the references to this issue will hereafter be referred to merely by page numbers).

What are the presuppositions and implications of this way of looking at class-caste phenomena? I try to deal with this question in this part.

1. The nature of caste

"...Those who claim an interest in the progressive emancipation of the people of this country need to be clear about the nature of caste -- its material basis in history and in the present, and the reason for its continuing use in the conduct of politics by those who control that politics" (p.223) (italics mine). The methodological issues raised by this way of understanding caste is the principle of historicism. I raise this in (2), under "class-caste nexus in history: the problem of origin and development of caste".

The editorial goes on to say: "However underpinned caste division may be with heredity, ritual, cultural and pollution conscious practices, etc. for the majority of Indians the material base in relation to land and extraction of surplus from the land is inescapable" (p.223)(italics mine). Implicit in the metaphor of "underpinning" is the suggestion that caste is an epiphenomenon, a superimposition, and not a

substantial social phenomenon/reality. Let me illustrate similar points of view expressed in the following statements:

(i) Casteism mystifies and obscures the fast growing class differentiation in the rural communities (P.C.Joshi, p.359).

(ii) Indian varna/caste divisions have for their essence the class stratification of society (Ajit Roy, p.301). Also, "the varna division from its original beginning was essentially a reflection of class differentiation, sustained by the ideological and political domination of the ruling elite (p.299).

(iii) "The manner in which caste is superimposed on tribal society and the relations of superiority and inferiority that are established within the caste hierarchy makes it easy for this organisation to serve the purpose of the division between owners and slaves. Again, when society is ripe for a transition from the slave to the feudal phase, caste could easily be used to cover up the relation between land and serf" (Namboodripad Social Scientist 64, Nov. 1977, p.4).

(iv) Gail Omvedt speaks of two hierarchies developed in the traditional feudal system; one, the hierarchy of groups defined in terms of their relation to land; the other, a hierarchy of artisans and service workers. And then she says; "Overlaying this was the ideology of caste-based on notions of purity and pollution, hereditary transmission of qualities, and ultimately sanctioned by religious notions of service to and exchange with goods". (p409)(italics mine).

Is caste merely an epiphenomenon, a superimposition, a part of superstructure? A view that differs somewhat from those presented above, is, I believe, stated in the following:

"...Kinship systems, of which caste is a particular rigid example, are not actually ideological reflections thrown up in the superstructure, but are the units of the relations of production themselves. This makes them extremely stubborn social institutions which, after their economic basis has been destroyed, may continue to persist in institutions and social consciousness" (Lieten, p.319)(italics mine). Does this not imply that for Lieten, it will not do by saying that caste is merely part of the superstructure? Let me sum up: In the above formulations, class-caste relationship is described through terms such as "superimposition", "covering up", "mystifying and obscuring", "underpinning" etc. What do these terms mean? To illumine the relationship between class and caste, we need to consider class-caste nexus in historical terms.

2. Class-caste nexus in history: the problem of origin and development of caste

The methodological principle involved in understanding a social phenomena/institution such as caste, in the Marxian perspective is historicism. What is historicism? It is the belief that an adequate understanding or evaluation of any phenomenon is to be gained by considering it in terms of the place it occupied and the role it played within a process of historical development. "Each event has to be understood in terms of a larger process of which it was a phase or in which it played a part and that only through an understanding of the nature of this process can we fully understand or evaluate concrete events." Finally, "historicism involves a genetic model of explanation and an attempt to base all evaluation upon the nature of the historical process itself" (Mandelbaum 1967:vol.4, p.24).

Consideration of class-caste issue in the Marxian perspective hence does involve raising questions about origin

of caste and its role/function and development in various successive historical stages. This concern is expressed in several articles of the EPW (Vide those by Sharad Patil, p.296; by Ajit Roy, p.299; EMS, p.329-336; Lieten, p.315; Gail Omvedt, p.409-10).

One of the outstanding formulations of class-caste issue in the Marxist perspective of history is illustrated in Prof.D.D.Kosambi's "The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India". I believe Kosambi's historical insights and very lucid formulation of the issue provide an excellent backdrop for the attempts made by the Marxist thinkers on this theme, in their articles in the EPW. May I indicate, through a few selective excerpts from Kosambi's work, the way this complex issue is dealt with?

(i) "The main feature of Indian society, seen at its strongest in the rural parts, is caste. This means the division of society into many groups which live side by side, but often do not seem to live together.... Most peasants will not take cooked food or water from the hands of a lower caste. That is, caste has a rough hierarchy. In practice, the number of such caste groups goes into thousands. In theory there are only four castes: the brahmin ... or priest caste; the Kshatriya - warrior; vaisya - trader or husbandman; and sudra, the lowest caste which corresponds to the working class. This theoretical system is roughly that of classes, whereas the observed castes and sub-castes derive clearly from tribal groups of different ethnic origin. Their very names show this. The relative status of the small local castes depends always upon the extent of, and the castes' economic position in the common market.... The same caste may have different positions in the hierarchy for two different regions. If this differentiation persists for some time, the separate branches may often regard themselves as different castes, no longer intermarrying. The lower one

goes in the economic scale, the lower the caste in the social scale on the whole. At the lowest end we still have purely tribal groups many of whom are in a food-gathering stage. The surrounding general society is now food-producing"(p.15-6).

(ii) "Caste is class on a primitive level of production"

What holds caste together in theory is the top position of the brahmins. The bond of production varied, but there was a bond. Caste is class on a primitive level of production. In many cases, the bond is simply of peasant families, all related, joining in general agriculture. But many castes were the equivalent of medieval guilds following specialized professions such as basket-makers, herb-vendors (vaidu), diggers (vaddars), fishermen.... The tribal origins of many such castes is known. e.g. Kaivarta in Bihar and Bengal for fishermen, Bhoi in Maharashtra. The totemic features also present themselves: Every original inhabitant has the same surname. Crocodile (Magar), wolf (Landge), peacock (More), the sacred pipal tree (Pimple) speak for themselves. Whatever the origin, some totemic observances still remain. For example, the Mores cannot eat peacock flesh, the Pimples will not eat off the leaves of their totem tree and at one time would not cut its branches for firewood...."(p.50).

(iii) From tribal to agrarian society

"Disruption of the tribal people and their merger into general agrarian society would not have been possible merely by winning over the chief and a few leading members. The way people satisfied their daily needs had also to be changed for the caste-class structure to work. The tribe as a whole turned into a new peasant jati caste group, generally ranked as Sudras, with as many as possible of the previous institutions (including endogamy) brought over.

The brahmins here acted as pioneers in undeveloped localities ...."

"The brahmin often preserved tribal or local peasant jati customs and primitive lore in some special or modified form, as the priest who had taken them over...."

"...This procedure enabled Indian society to be formed out of many diverse and often discordant elements, with the minimum use of violence. But the very manner in which the development took place inhibited the growth of commodity production and hence of culture, beyond a certain level. The emphasis upon superstitions meant an incredible proliferation of senseless ritual ...."(p.172-3).

The point of these rather extensive quotations, stated rather randomly, is to indicate the possibility that the class-caste relationship could be illumined only in the context of history. I took Kosambi to be the outstanding social scientist using the historicist method in the Marxian perspective. Lest I misstate Kosambi's methodological commitments, may I state his views on history, culture and the role and function of history?

(a) History: "History is the presentation in chronological order or successive changes in the means and relations of production" (p.10).

(b) Culture: "Culture must ... be understood also in the sense of the ethnographer, to describe the essential ways of life of the whole people" (p.10).

(c) What is history? Kosambi approvingly quotes E.H.Carr: "The function of the historian is neither to love the past nor to emancipate himself from the past, but to master and understand it as the key to the understanding of the present. Great history is written precisely when the historian's vision of the past is illuminated by insight into the problems of the present.... Learning from history is never a one-way

process. To learn about the present in the light of the past also means to learn about the past in the light of the present. The function of history is to promote a profounder understanding of both past and present through the interrelation between them ("What is History?", London, 1962, p.20, 31, 32)."

A point of considerable methodological relevance. is the relation between history and social anthropology. ((Section II of this paper deals with village studies carried out by social (and cultural) anthropologists.))

On a paper on "Historicism", which I presented a few years ago, I had said. The historicist explanation lays stress on the genetic model of explanation. It seeks to see, for example, how caste came to be what it is today, tracing the development from its origin. Similarly, it queries into the origin of religion. And so on about other themes and problems. During the heydey of evolutionism, one went to the extreme of tracing everything to its origin and leaving the matter there. The pendulum has swung to the other extreme now. Of late, the genetic model is in great disrepute among the scientists, especially the social scientists thanks to the positivists in philosophy and the structural functionalists in anthropology and sociology. I believe it is high time modern positivism and a moderate historicism defined the limits of their explanatory power and use (p.1-2).

In recent times, a distinguished social anthropologist Evans-Pritchard has emphatically stressed the need for history for social anthropology when you are dealing with studies of complex societies (e.g. Indian village studies) which have a long tradition and history: "...Anthropologists are now studying communities which, if still fairly simple in structure are enclosed in, and form part of, great historical studies, such as ...Indian rural communities. They can no longer ignore history, making a virtue out of necessity, but must explicitly

reject it or admit its relevance. As anthropologists turn their attention to more complex civilized communities, the issue will become more acute, and the direction of theoretical development in the subject will largely depend on its outcome" (1962, p.1-2).

This is from the side of social anthropology. What relevance anthropology has for history? Kosambi speaks of "history studied in the field". But, "How is a history of India to be written when so little documentation is available?" "The country has one tremendous advantage that was not utilised recently by the historian: the survival within different social layers of many forms that allow the reconstruction of totally diverse earlier stages. To find these strata one had to move from the cities into the countryside" (p.13). What according to Kosambi is possible <u>to show</u> if history is studied in the field? "This stratification of Indian society reflects and explains a great deal of Indian history, if studied in the field without prejudice. It can be shown that many castes owe their lower social and economic status to their present or former refusal to take to food production and plough agriculture. The lowest castes often preserve tribal rites, usages, and myths. A little higher up we see these religious observances and legends in transition, often by assimilation to other parallel traditions. Another step above, they have been written by brahmins to suit themselves, and to give the brahmin caste predominance in priesthood, which in the lower castes is not generally in the hands of the brahmins. Still higher we come to what is called 'Hindu' culture, the literate traditions that often go back to much older times.... The main work of brahminism has been to gather the myths together, to display them in a better developed social framework" (p.15).

To conclude: I believe an adequate grasp of class-caste relationship in history is indispensable for a deeper

level understanding of the present day village India. I shall now turn to the methodological issues that centre round conceptualization of the Indian rural social structure in Marxist terms. The conceptual technique used for describing a rural structure is of course, class analysis.

II. CLASS ANALYSIS OF INDIAN RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

(i) One of the critical problems here is the precise identification of classes that constitute the village social structure. The EPW editorial says: "...If the precise identification of classes in Indian society is proved elusive, it is because the "manifold gradations of social rank" which Marx speaks for the west (patricians, knights, plebians and slaves in ancient Rome; and feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices and serfs in Europe of the middle ages) have taken in the Indian context the form of class (?) and caste has been further complicated by quasi-religious sanctions and prohibitions" (p.223).

Putting it simply: (i) the issue here is, how to differentiate the classes in the rural areas in India?; (ii) the issues that arise in describing rural social structure in class terms in the background of caste-framework. What is the class caste correlation? How is the specific character of a class modified by caste? How are the dialectical relationships between classes modified/influenced by caste structure?

(a) What classes?

What are the criteria for determining class status in the rural areas? Lenin first formulated them in the context of the Russian social situation of his times (see "To the Rural Poor", second revised edition, 1967, Moscow: Progress Publishers). The model of class differentiation of the peasantry he developed used class categories such as landless, poor, middle and rich peasants and the landlord. Mao used this model

creatively to grasp the Chinese rural situation so as to change/transform its basic structure.

Social scientists in India influenced by this tradition have, by and large, continued to use these categories with some modifications. I have already mentioned Joan Mencher. To illustrate another example, one may look at Prasad's article "Caste and Class in Bihar" in the EPW. His analysis is carried out in terms of the following: 'Poor peasant' and 'agricultural labourers' are used synonymously; the middle peasant; the big peasant and the landlord. He describes some formal criteria to distinguish each category (p.484). May I draw attention to the controversy raised by Ashok Rudra: "There are only two classes in Indian agriculture, one of which is termed 'the class of big landowners', the other 'the class of agricultural labourers'. These two classes are in antagonistic contradiction with each other, and this contradiction constitutes the principal contradiction in our rural society" (Three articles in the EPW, XIII, Nos.22, 23, 24, June 3, 10 and 24, 1978).

The issue is too large and I feel one cannot go into it here; also, I confess, I do not feel able to argue against Rudra's position. I feel inclined to suggest however, that the issue cannot be decided a priori, on theoretical grounds alone, in the sense that the question "what class categories?" is intimately bound up with the task of grasping the rural social structure <u>at the micro as well as at the macro level</u> with a view to identify the nature of several tensions/contradictions between the various classes, as a <u>basis for mobilization of the rural poor at the micro as well as macro levels.</u> Finally Rudra's position rests on the view that the mode of production in Indian agriculture is capitalistic; now this has been controversial. But these are vague statements, and I leave the issue at that.

Description of Indian village social structure in terms of classes, amongst other factors, has to take account of the following:

(i) Class analysis is not a formal, abstract inquiry, but conducted in structural-functional terms in the dialectical perspective.

(ii) The formal criteria for identifying class of rural households need be supplemented by more concrete case studies on the lines of Joan Mencher.

(iii) In order to fully capture the specifics of the Indian situation, class-analysis need be described in the background of caste-framework.

The question of grasping the specifics of class contradiction is related to the understanding of the <u>form</u> of class relations - the structural form. But, the form of class relations is a function of the mode of production. The question then arises: How do we describe the mode of production at the micro level as well as at the macro level?

(b) <u>What mode of production?</u>

What is the mode of production in Indian agriculture? Asiatic? Feudal? Semi-feudal? Colonial? Capitalistic?

There is a vigorous debate on the issue. To illustrate, I draw attention to the following articles: Ranjit Sau "On the Essence and Manifestation of Capitalism in Indian Agriculture", EPW vol.VIII, No.13, 1973, also, "Can Capitalism Develop in Indian Agriculture", XI, No.52, 1976; Jairus Bannerjee "Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture - A Comment", EPW, vol.VIII, No.14, 1973, also, "For a Colonial Mode of Production", VII, No.52, 1972; Amit Bhaduri "An Analysis of Semi-feudalism in East India", Frontier, Autumn Number 1973; Gail Omvedt, "India and the Colonial Mode of Production - Comments" EPW, X, No.42, 1975; Utsa Patnaik, "Development of Capitalism in Agriculture" (in two parts), vol.I, Nos.2 and 3, Sept. and Oct. 1972, also, "On the Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture - A reply", EPW, VII, No.40, 1972 etc; Hamza Alvi, "Feudalism and Capitalism in

....49

Indian Agriculture" (Mimeo), 1975 etc

The Marxist challenge in this debate is to specify parameters/indicators which would together define a particular mode of production, so as to be able to identify the specific mode. May I repeat: the issue here is not merely an academic one, but one that is related to, and influences practice.

At the macro all-India level, what is the generalization? A relatively more precise question would be: What is the predominant mode of production?

Given the diversities and variations at the local and regional level, the answer to the question, "What mode of production", cannot be a straightforward one - it cannot be, in many cases, in terms of one single mode (cf.Mencher who says that the mode of production in the rural areas of Chingleput District is a mixture of feudal and capitalistic elements). A country of the size of almost a sub-continent, with such uneven level of historical development, we should look for a pattern/combination, rather than a simplistic answer in terms of a single mode.

The conceptual and methodological issues involved are:

(a) identifying what mode of production - single, combination/pattern?

(b) the form of class relations; the contradictions between the various classes, the principal ones; the antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions;

(c) What are the issues that emerge as a result of these;

(d) The task of mobilization of the peasantry/rural poor through action-oriented programme based on these issues.

Finally, what one can say to the view held by some that class analysis cannot be used as a tool for village studies

at the micro(village) level? I have mentioned some village studies at the micro level, (e.g. Mencher's etc.) which have used the Marxist class-framework. Again, this is not merely a theoretical issue. Communist cadres deployed to mobilize peasantry in a village or group of villages have to understand/grasp the village social structure; how will they do it except in class terms? Such studies/understanding at the micro level has necessarily to be linked up with the situation at the macro level. But unless he understands the situation at the micro/local level, how does he mobilize?

The question of organizing the rural poor in a village or a group of villages is not an isolated one. It is organically/integrally related to the task of developing an overall strategy of mobilizing at the all-India level. The strategy provides the practical basis for defining tasks on the kisan front.

But these tasks become meaningful and effective only when the understanding at the micro level is concretized and integrally related to that at the macro level so as to provide a concrete basis for action at both the levels.

As a theoretical basis for developing an all-India strategy, how can one avoid generalization regarding the mode of production at the macro level, however simplistic and tentative it may be? Such a generalization is perhaps only a very rough hypothesis.

If what I say makes sense, then one implication of this position is that the issue here is not of opting out for either a micro level or middle-range level theorising or for developing an all-comprehensive theory at the macro level. The need is for continuous dialectical interaction between understanding at the micro, middle and macro levels; the point of saying dialectical is that there is a tension between understanding at various levels and an adequate generalization need to emerge by resolving this tension conceptually and testing its validity through practice.

THE QUESTION OF OBJECTIVITY AND VALIDITY OF THE MARXIST FRAMEWORK

The issue again is too large for consideration here. Social science influenced by Marxism, I contend, reject the simplistic epistemological model developed by the empiricists such as Locke and the later positivists. The subjective-objective dichotomy presupposed by this model is far too simplistic and misleading and cannot provide adequate criteria for evaluating investigations/inquiries as scientific or not. Such a social science also rejects the dichotomy between fact and value, between descriptive and normative, between value-neutral description and ideologies. I have considered some of these issues elsewhere ("Epistemology of the Social Sciences", SAPI: 17-29, 1978, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi).

The point of making these remarks rather dogmatically is to draw attention to some of the deeper issues in philosophy of science that Marxist methodology raises.

What is it that makes a particular methodology fruitful? What is it that makes a scientific theory objective/true? Marx said: "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. In practice man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness ... of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is purely a scholastic question" (second thesis from "Theses on Feurbach").

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